

PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
April 7, 2004

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CANADIAN CON ARTIST CONVICTED

PHOENIX, ARIZONA -- The United States Attorney's Office for the District of Arizona announced that on April 6, 2004, LESLIE CHARLES COHEN, DOB 3-29-41, of Goodyear, Arizona, was found guilty of Bank Fraud, Making False Statements to a Bank, Misuse of a Social Security Number, and Identity Fraud, by a federal jury at Phoenix, Arizona.

The evidence at trial showed COHEN, a citizen of Canada, deposited worthless checks drawn on Canadian bank accounts he controlled to fraudulently inflate account balances at Arizona banks so that he could withdraw funds for his own use before the Canadian checks were returned unpaid. COHEN deposited more than \$500,000 of worthless checks in a 15 month period, and caused losses in excess of \$150,000 to Arizona banks. When the banks suffered losses and closed the accounts in question, COHEN used other identities, including assumed Social Security Numbers and fictitious dates of birth to conceal his true identity and open up new accounts with the same banks. COHEN perpetrated this same scheme multiple times.

Agents executed a search warrant at COHEN's residence and seized more than 1500 blank checks, as well as some already signed and ready to be deposited. The jury forfeited those checks as being used or intended to be used in the fraudulent scheme.

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The defendant is being held in custody following trial.

COHEN had been charged with eight counts of violating Title 18 of the United States Code, Section 1344, Bank Fraud; four counts of violating 18 USC § 1014, Making False Statements to a Bank; four counts of violating 42 USC § 408(a)(7)(C), Misuse of a Social Security Number; and two counts of violating 18 USC § 1028(a)(7), Identity Fraud.

The defendant faces penalties of up to 30 years in prison and fines of up to \$1,000,000 on each of the Bank Fraud and False Statement counts, up to five years in prison and \$250,000 on each of the Social Security counts, and up to 15 years in prison and \$250,000 on each of the Identity Fraud counts. The case was tried before United States District Court Judge James A. Teilborg, from March 25, 2004 to April 6, 2004.

The investigation leading to the guilty verdict was conducted by the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Office of Inspector General-Social Security Administration.

Sentencing is set before Judge Teilborg on July 12, 2004.

The prosecution is being handled by Daniel Drake, Assistant United States Attorney, District of Arizona, Phoenix, Arizona.

CASE NUMBER: CR-03-0342-PHX-JAT
RELEASE NUMBER: 2004-066

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